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## John Newell Hurty:

### *The M.D. Who Never Practiced Medicine*



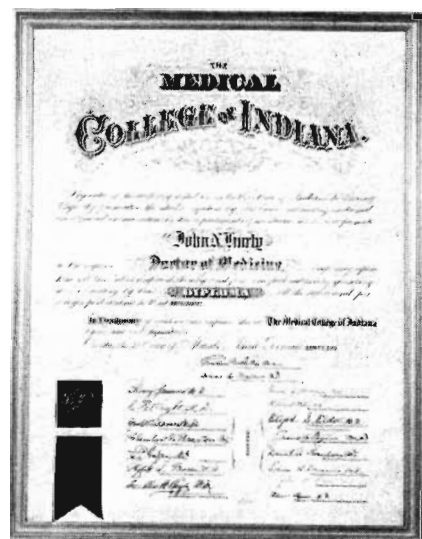
**T**HIS MONTH'S illustration is the M.D. diploma of Dr. John Newell Hurty (featured also in last month's column). Dr. Hurty was 39 years old and a pharmacist when he received this M.D. degree in 1891. He never practiced medicine. How it was that he became secretary of the Indiana State Board of Health five years later (for which the M.D. degree was mandatory) is told most succinctly in the words of Dr. Thurmon B. Rice (ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF INDIANA MEDICINE 1849 - 1949, p. 44).

"... As a druggist Dr. J. N. Hurty came to work each morning to his drug store and laboratory at the corner of Ohio and Pennsylvania streets where the Federal Building now stands. He rode a bicycle past a row of buildings belonging to the Hon. William English, Sr. There was so much typhoid in this row of buildings that it had come to be known as 'typhoid row.' Dr.

Hurty had his own ideas as to what caused typhoid, so he purchased a five-gallon can of kerosene and, under cover of nightfall, went along this row putting about half a gallon of kerosene into each of the privies. The next day, the water of the wells of the neighborhood tasted so strongly of kerosene that it could not be drunk. This was a spectacular demonstration as to the probable cause of typhoid fever, but it didn't make any great hit with William English, who was extremely angry about it. Inasmuch as he (Mr. English) was a political rival of Governor Claude Matthews, the latter was greatly pleased by the Hurty demonstration, and he made inquiry as to who this man, Dr. Hurty, might be. . ."

Soon after this event, Dr. Hurty became secretary of the Indiana State Board of Health.

Dr. Hurty apparently never hung his diploma on the wall. When Dr. Rice wrote chapter 8 of HOOSIER HEALTH OFFICER ("Did Hurty Have a Medical Degree") in August 1939, he was not aware of the existence of the document, and neither was Hurty's family. Some of Dr. Hurty's critics also doubted its existence, claiming that he had only an honorary degree (from the Central College of Physicians and Surgeons). Dr. Rice presented evidence



that the degree was granted in 1891; however, even though all of Hurty's records and papers were searched thoroughly after his death in 1925, no diploma had actually been found.

Miss Louise Lingenfelter, Dr. Hurty's former secretary, on reading Dr. Rice's article in the *Bulletin* (of the Indiana State Board of Health) wrote that she remembered the diploma, that it was kept in a capped metal tube in his rolltop desk at the Board of Health. This tube, with its corroded closed lid, was located, opened, and the diploma found. It now is framed and hangs on the front wall of the Amphitheater.